



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 19 Sep – 25 Sep 2011



Countdown to 7 December 1941.

20 September 1941 Major General Frederick Martin, Commander of the Hawaiian Air Force, proposed **joint exercises** for late November. Martin's fears about a surprise Japanese attack were reflected in the scenario, which was to "continue until enemy carrier-based aircraft have attacked Oahu and have theoretically destroyed the Hawaiian Air Force and Navy and Marine units present thereat. . ." Martin wanted to know whether his bombers could detect and destroy an enemy fleet before it struck at Hawaii – or whether the enemy carriers could reach an attack launch point undetected.

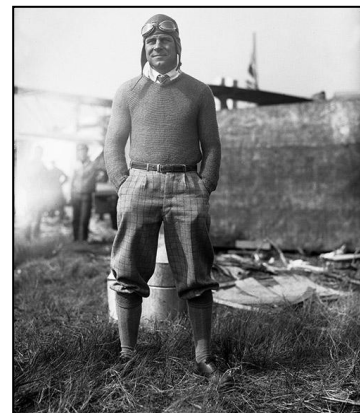
24 September 1941 Vice Admiral Shigeru Fukudome, Japanese Naval General Staff, held a secret conference on the "Hawaiian Operation." One of the topics was the **date of the attack**. Most senior Japanese officers wanted to strike in late November and then shift to the Southern Operation, but the airmen in the Combined Fleet warned their training would not be complete. So the date of the attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet moved toward December.

On the same day, intelligence agents in Japan's Honolulu consulate were ordered to report the exact locations of U.S. warships in Pearl Harbor. The orders included dividing the harbor into five sub-areas: Ford Island, the area southwest of Ford Island, and the East, Middle and West Lochs. Known later as the **"bomb plot" message**, it was intercepted by U.S. intelligence but never briefed to Admiral Kimmel, CINCPACFLT, or to Lt. General Short, Commander of the Army's Hawaiian Department. Most Washington officials assumed the Hawaiian commanders got this same intelligence through other channels and that the Japanese wanted the information only to track U.S. ship movements in and out of port.

25 September 1918 **MEDAL OF HONOR**. On a voluntary patrol, Capt. Edward V. Rickenbacker spotted seven German aircraft. Despite the odds, he dove on them and shot down two of the enemy. For this action, he received the Medal of Honor.

24 September 1929 At Mitchel Field, NY, Lt. James H. "Jimmy" Doolittle (right) made the **first instruments-only, all-blind flight**, from takeoff to landing. Doolittle flew a Consolidated NY-2 airplane with a completely covered cockpit for a short distance and landed. A check pilot monitored the flight.

Doolittle made important contributions to aviation technology, specifically instrument flying. He helped develop fog-flying equipment including the artificial horizon and directional gyroscope. These achievements made all-weather flight operations safe and practical, and earned Doolittle the Harmon Trophy.





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20 September 1941 The Army Air Forces activated the **Philippine Department Air Force**—later called Far East Air Force and still later Fifth Air Force—at Nichols Field on Luzon.

21 September 1942 The **Boeing B-29 Superfortress** made its first flight. This aircraft had many innovations such as super-charged engines that enabled it to carry bomb loads across the vast Pacific Ocean to targets in Japan. Combined with a pressurized cabin, the B-29 could fly at 40,000 feet and 350 mph, where it was an extremely difficult target for both Japanese fighters and anti-aircraft artillery.



25 September 1947 President Truman named Gen. Carl A. Spaatz as the **first USAF chief of staff**. On the following day, Defense Secretary James W. Forrestal ordered air personnel, bases, and materiel transferred from the Army to the new Department of the Air Force.

20 September 1951 A monkey and 11 mice survived an Aerobee flight to an altitude of 236,000 feet, marking the **first time the Air Force had recovered animals from a rocket flight**.

23 September 1951 The 27th Fighter-Escort Wing received the **first F-84G Thunderjet** (photo below). The F-84G was the first fighter with built-in aerial refueling capability, the first single-seat



aircraft that could carry a nuclear bomb, and the first aircraft of the USAF Thunderbirds flight demonstration team (right).



20 September 1957 General Thomas D. White, Air Force Chief of Staff, announced that radar units could detect ICBMs at a distance of 3,000 miles. On 17 September 1964, President Johnson announced that the United States had an **over-the-horizon radar** that could see around the earth's curvature to detect missiles shortly after their launch.

23 September 1959 **USAF Space Roles and Missions**. The DoD gave the Air Force responsibility for space transportation and ultimately all space booster rockets.

21 September 1964 At Palmdale, California, **North American's B-70A Valkyrie** flew for the



first time. The huge delta-wing aircraft was a strategic bomber that could fly up to three times the speed of sound and at altitudes above 70,000 feet, but advances in enemy surface-to-air missile technology curtailed its production at the prototype stage.



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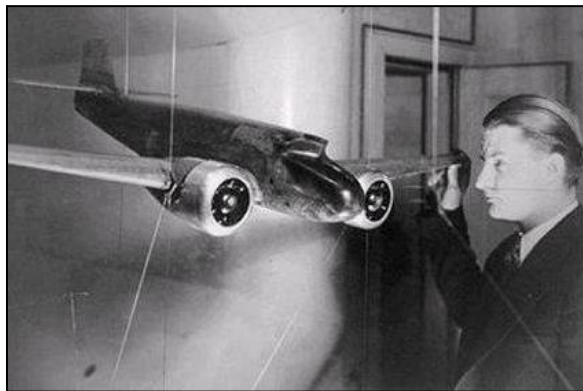
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24 September 1964 President Johnson presented aviation's highest honor, the **Robert J. Collier Trophy to Clarence L. "Kelly" Johnson** of Lockheed (pictured at right). Ten days earlier, Kelly Johnson also received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award.

One of the most talented and prolific aircraft design engineers in the history of aviation, Kelly Johnson and Lockheed's "Skunk Works" designed and/or developed over 40 aircraft, including the P-38, F-104, U-2 and SR-71.

Johnson's boss at Lockheed once exclaimed, "That damned Swede can actually see air!"



20 September 1966 At Edwards AFB, Lt. Col. Donald M. Sorlie became the first USAF pilot to fly **NASA's M2-F2 Lifting Body**. Air-launched from a B-52 at 45,000 feet, the M2-F2 tested the concept that a space capsule could fly back from space rather than parachuting into the sea.



The M2-F2 crashed in 1967, seriously injuring the test pilot. Footage of the crash became familiar to millions when it was used in the opening credits of the TV series *The Six Million Dollar Man*.

20-21 September 1982 The 320th Bomb Wing at Mather AFB tested Navy **Harpoon anti-shipping** missiles for compatibility with the **B-52**. At the same time, a B-52G from the 416th Bomb Wing at Griffiss AFB conducted the **first ALCM operational test launch**.

24 September 1987 The **Thunderbirds** gave their first show ever in the People's Republic of China before some 20,000 Chinese in Beijing.

20 September 2010 The Air Force officially unveiled the **first Global Hawk unmanned aircraft system (UAS) deployed to the Pacific region**. The remotely piloted aircraft arrived at Andersen Air Force Base on Guam earlier in the month for testing prior to operational missions.

22 September 2010 **Medal of Honor**. President Obama presented the nation's highest honor to the family of Chief Master Sgt. Richard Etchberger, who was killed in 1967 while saving fellow airmen as they evacuated a mountaintop radar site in Laos. The award had been delayed for decades because of the secrecy and political sensitivity of the mission at that time. Video of the ceremony and the President's remarks can be viewed at this [White House webpage](#).

